

**Inside the Artist -  
Rachel Laundon  
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**Tell us about your journey in art / as an artist.**

My journey as a creative entrepreneur began 10 years ago in 2006. It was a year of milestones. I earned my bachelor's degree in K12 Art Education from Johnson State College, married my wonderful husband Sage, and together we purchased a lovely uninsulated 1860s farmhouse at the bottom of Barnes Hill in Waterbury Center.

I had some middle school teaching experience but as enthusiastic as I am and as much as I adore children, I lack the management and discipline skills needed in a public school classroom. I recall the kids throwing clay against the window, slapping each other's backs with paint covered hands, and one Saturday after I had taught a lesson in graffiti I drove by the school to see a large HI spray painted on the brick outside of the art classroom. Yeah not for me. I had experience selling and displaying my artwork in the community. I'd also developed a hand painted jewelry line that was selling well. I decided to pursue my art full time as a career.

I dislike the term starving artist; it is negative and a disservice to the profession. You can make a living as an artist. Talent plays a role in an artist's success but mostly it takes guts, grit and stick-to-itiveness. Sage has always been a supporter of my work and was generous enough to agree to letting me pursue my passion. It is a precious gift that I am thankful for every day. I didn't have a manual or any business knowledge but dove in. I registered my business The Posh Pod with the state, bought a pop up tent from amazon and signed up for the Waterbury Farmer's Market as a vendor. I spent the next 5 years embedded in the craft show scene primarily selling my jewelry line but eventually phased that out in favor of creating custom appliqued jeans, collage, pet portrait and fish wall art sculptures. In 2012 I narrowed my focus to off-the-wall fish and dog wall sculptures and changed my business name to Rachel Laundon Art.

While my custom pet portrait business was good, a large portion of the work was creating pet memorial portraits. They made me

sad, bogged me down, and I began experiencing creative blocks for the first time. I need to be in a positive head and heart space when I'm creating to produce my best work, I did not want my artwork to reflect any negativity. I made the decision to discontinue dog portraits and to focus on my fish.

Everything carries energy, which I feel we experience on a subliminal level. I want my artwork to communicate to the viewer the joy I feel during its creation. Fish make me happy. The fact that there is a mysterious world that exists under the water's surface fills me with wonder. I enjoy snorkeling reefs and fishing with my husband for bass, pike and the occasional bowfin. I recently got to experience catching 40 lb stripers top water in Rhode Island, it was a good day. Fish naturally have a wide array of color and patterns and are already beautiful works of art. In my artwork I often represent a species in their natural colors and patterns but I also enjoy creating more abstract versions, their fantastical alter egos.



A lot of time and labor goes into the creation of a fish. Sage cuts the forms and carves their faces in high relief from wood. I decorate their bodies in vibrant colors and patterns with either acrylic, oil, or encaustic paint. The fins are cut from copper that I hammer and oxidize. I hand paint each eye and glue them to convex glass cabochons. Often I incorporate repurposed objects either layered beneath the eye or running along the flanks. I've discovered it is most efficient to produce work in schools of 8-10 fish. Doing each step in sequence. Pandora, podcasts and my dog Nepal keep me company while I work. Nepal resides mostly in his bed under my work table but if I'm hammering, playing with fire, or working with foul chemicals he will beeline to his other favorite residence, the bathtub.



It has been fun to track the evolution of my fish. Each one is unique; each has its own personality and reflects my stage as an artist when it was created. I can look at a fish from 2012 and visibly chart my progress as a painter and craftsperson. Today they swim on the Walls of the Blue Paddle Bistro in South Hero, Grand Isle Artworks in Grand Isle, Just the Place in St. Albans, The Artisan Gallery in Waitsfield, The Hive, in Middlesex, Stowe Street Cafe in Waterbury and the Rt 100 Store in Waterbury Center. I also sell my fish online at my website [rachellaundon.com](http://rachellaundon.com) as well as on etsy. I have cut down on the amount of craft shows that I participate in as the entry fees are steep and it is hard to transport larger work without collateral damage. I do appreciate the value of a craft show. It is generally the only time that I am customer facing. Being able to hear comments, view facial expressions and witness how customers interact with my work provides valuable information. I also enjoy meeting new customers and artisans and hearing their suggestions and feedback.

**What medium do you like most?**

Hands down Encaustic. In March our family went on a ski trip to Whistler, BC. When I was not skiing I was touring the local galleries. In one I came across a large scale painting that captivated me. It was unlike anything I have experienced. Patterns played along its textured surface and peeked through milky transparent layers, the color was luminous in a way I've never seen paint behave, and it smelled like honey. I wanted to bite into the corner of the painting like candy, it was luscious. I had seen encaustic art in print but never in person. It was love bordering on obsession at first sight. I was compelled to learn this ancient art.

Over the next few months I poured over books and YouTube videos that taught the basics of encaustic painting. I pieced together the tools and materials necessary and even learned how to cook my own paint from purified beeswax, damar resin crystals and pigment powders. The most important tools in encaustic painting, besides the paint, are a heated palette and a butane torch. Encaustic art making is hot and fast! In order to paint, your brushes need to be warm, the paint needs to be melted from solid to liquid form, and the second your heated brush loaded with molten wax leaves the surface of the heated palette it starts cooling, you have to work fast. Each layer you paint onto your surface needs to be fused to the layer underneath with either a heat gun or fire I prefer fire. The surface can be scratched or built up to produce beautiful texture.



Encaustic is a perfect medium for collage and embedding objects into, it works well with the architectural clay I use and is compatible with oil paint. Encaustic painting is arguably the most durable form of painting. There are Egyptian mummy portraits painted in encaustic that have survived 2000 years without any cracking, flaking, or fading. Initially I was nervous about investing so much time and money into a medium I wasn't sure I'd be proficient at. I worried customers wouldn't appreciate or embrace the waxy deliciousness of Encaustic art. I am happy to say that my first school of encaustic fish are thriving; half have already found forever homes! I am grateful, it is encouraging and affirming. I am currently in the process of a second school of encaustic fish. They are painted and looking fabulous lounging against the wall of my studio awaiting their armored fins.

**What most inspires your work - Has there been anything that has been life changing or that has influenced your practice?**

I draw inspiration from materials. Especially dirty, rusty, shiny things that have a history. I adore wandering the aisles of Home Depot, Goodwill, and the ReStore, perusing flea market table treasures, and shopping for fashions at thrift stores. I also find inspiration visiting galleries and seeing what other artists are doing. I like soaking the art in from afar as well as getting up close and personal to the piece trying to dissect the artists techniques and processes. I'm also find inspiration between the hours of 3:00 am 7:00 am. It is a magical time, I like the quiet and darkness of it, uninterrupted except for the occasional rumble of a plow truck driving by.

I have had two major art discoveries that have propelled my art. The first is architectural clay called Skatch. I came across this exciting medium 3 years ago while shopping for art supplies on Craigslist. The ad boasted an air hardening, durable, environmentally safe clay that stuck to wood, metal, and glass. At \$2/lb it sounded too good to be true I immediately ordered 50 lbs and got to work. This product delivers! It has been a godsend. It is now a studio staple and I have established a friendship with its inventor, a wildly creative artist name Jared Nicholson who lives in New Mexico. He developed the medium to create his art cars. To see his incredible work and find out more about this amazing clay visit [skratchworks.com](http://skratchworks.com)



The second discovery is more recent and came about last year while I was struggling to meet demand in fish production. I began

considering outsourcing the business of cutting, routing, and sanding my wooden fish forms. During that time Sage learned about a machine called a CNC router. His workmate used one to carve relief sculpture for the VA. He began researching CNC machines and shared his findings with me.



Together we believed it could be the answer to the fish production problem. We dove in, I took out my first business loan and we purchased an 8'x4' ShopBot CNC router machine. It was installed July 2015 and we hit the ground running. I quickly realized I didn't have the patience or aptitude for this technology. Thank heavens Sage took to it like a duck to water. He is blessed with the perfect skill set to operate the machine, interpret my sketchbook drawings into digital vector art, and then to model them into 2.5 or 3D sculptures in a cad program. Sage has become an invaluable partner in the creation of my work. In the beginning it was a challenge for me to trust his competence as an artist and to relinquish creative control but I soon learned to let go completely. I can hand him a drawing from my sketchbook then days later see that same 2D drawing come to life in 3D as it is being carved on the CNC. I dream of us both being full time artists but until that day comes Sage is busy honing his graphic and machining skills in conjunction with his day job as an operations leader for a multinational health care company.

This technological innovation has freed me up to improve my painting skills, explore new mediums, techniques, and themes. I can draw in my sketchbook again and plan new pieces. It allows me the time to work on my website or post on social media. Love it or hate it, accepting and adopting technology in our artmaking process will help artists remain relevant in the future.



**What blogs or books are you reading or would recommend?**

I read a lot of art books I am currently reading *Creating Abstract Art: Ideas and Inspirations for Passionate ArtMaking* by Dean Nimmer.

I also listen to hours of podcasts, the longer the content the better as my hands are always covered in clay, paint or latex gloves and I loathe messing with my phone every 20 minutes to switch to a new one. A few of my favorites are:

The Tony Robbins Podcast

The Tim Ferriss Show

Snap Judgement

This American Life

And the Etsy Conversations Podcast

